

Wheel Publication No. 262

Faith and Refuge

Three Essays

*Soma Thera and
Sister Dhammadinnā*



**Faith in the Buddha's
Teaching
&
Refuge in the Triple Gem**

by

Soma Thera

**Saddhā: Buddhist
Devotion**

by

Sister Dhammadinnā

Buddhist Publication Society

The Wheel Publication No. 262

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Digital Transcription Source: BPS.

First Edition, 1978.

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Faith In The Buddha's Teaching

by

Soma Thera

“Bhikkhus, in the doctrine so rightly made known by me, which is plain, open, explicit, and speckless, all who have but faith in, and affection for me have heaven as their lot.” (M I 142)

“Who have but faith in, and affection for me.” By this phrase those persons who develop insight, but have in them no noble mental state beside mere faith in, and affection for the Perfect One are referred to. In these persons arise, after their insight practice, a singular faith in, and singular affection for Him who is endowed with the ten powers, the Buddha. With that faith and affection they are as it were taken by the hand and placed in heaven. It is said that they are possessed of an assured destiny. Ancient elders speak of such a

bhikkhu as a lesser Stream-entrant.

There is no doubt that faith is a cardinal virtue in the Dhamma: it is the means of entry into the dispensation. Everyone who (after listening to the Buddha) went for refuge to him, the teaching and the community of bhikkhus, was impelled by faith. Often those who went for refuge to the Buddha after receiving instruction from him spoke thus:

“Marvellous, venerable sir! As if, venerable sir, a person were to turn face upwards what is upside down, or to uncover the concealed, or to point the way to one who is lost, or to carry a lamp in the darkness believing, “Those who have eyes will see forms,” so has the Dhamma been set forth in many ways by the Blessed One. I, venerable sir, go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma for refuge, and to the community of bhikkhus for refuge. Venerable sir, may the Blessed One regard me as a follower who has gone for refuge for life from today.” (D I 85)

This form of going for refuge to the three jewels, the noblest objects for the Buddhist, appears as one of the ways of declaring the disciple’s faith in the presence of the Buddha.

Criticism in the sense of careful judgment belongs to the fundamentals of the doctrine and is necessary for reaching right understanding (*sammādiṭṭhi*). A teaching should not be accepted by a reasonable person without investigation,

particularly if he wants to live in conformity with it. The Buddha says:

“Bhikkhus, a person who causes another’s establishment in a wrongly-explained doctrine-and-discipline, the one he establishes in it, and the established one who practises to realise what he has been taught, all these produce much demerit. Why is that? Because of the wrong explanation of the doctrine. ... Bhikkhus, a person who is energetic in a wrongly-explained-doctrine dwells unhappily. Why is that? Because of the wrong explanation of doctrine.” (D I 34)

Study of a teaching through inquiring into it is unfavourable to credulity; but such study may produce faith in the teaching if it is true and intelligible. There are some people who, without examining the Dhamma properly, speak of it as a kind of rationalism, and of the Buddha “as an early rationalist introducing the blessings of commonsense into a world which knew nothing better than the mysticism of the Upanishads.” [1] By such talk they cause a good deal of misunderstanding. There is no doubt that the Buddha was rational and that his teaching accords with reason. But it is incorrect to call him a rationalist. He was one of robust faith. His faith was connected with knowledge and founded on it. It is because the Bodhisatta had faith in truth and his ability to find it that he went forth from home to homelessness. It was because of his faith that

he was able to renounce his princely state. He underwent all the great troubles, vexations and sufferings of his six years of search for light only because he believed that there was a way out of the miseries of existence to freedom. He was of an analytical turn of mind from the very start of his quest. He would not accept anything without scrutiny. But for applying what he found out by analysis to life he required faith, and he saw that it was indispensable in his experiments with aspects of the truth he reached as a seeker. It was his faith that carried him from partial understanding ever onward.

The Bodhisatta's reasonableness is seen nowhere more than in his wisdom in venturing forth beyond what he learned from his teachers, especially from Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. This is the aspect of faith that won for him his goal. It is owing to the strength of the venturesome or aspiring characteristic (*sampakkhandana lakkhana*) of the Bodhisatta's faith that his striving for enlightenment was unremitting till he reached the supreme goal. But it is wrong to think that he ceased to have faith after that. It was his faith in human nature, in the supremacy of the truth, and its ability to conquer the hearts of men, that made him toil for forty-five years in the service of the world till he passed away at the ripe old age of eighty (having founded a dispensation that for its virility is as remarkable today as it was when the Blessed One set in motion the Wheel of his incomparable doctrine at the Deer Park in Benares, twenty-five centuries ago). Therefore it is said of this indefatigable

worker for the welfare of all living beings:

Marvellous is the tireless Victor ever
Striving for all beings' weal and bliss. [2]

(Cariyāpiṭaka)

The Buddha did not teach rationalism. His teaching is beyond all *isms* in its essential portion. *Isms* have to do with being (*bhava*). The essence of the Dhamma, the knowledge and vision of uttermost freedom, belongs to the sphere of the transcending of being. The Buddha was not contemptuous of commonsense, but the core of his doctrine is uncommon. Commonsense cannot grasp it. What can grasp it is a mental state beyond normal sensitivity. That does not mean that the Dhamma is a mysticism. Since faith that is accordant with facts is necessary to bring that state into being, and not the faith of mysticism, which is based on what does not exist, the Dhamma is different from mysticism in its methods and principles no less than its goal.

What is the faith a disciple of the Buddha needs? Faith in the fruit of action (*kammaphala-saddhā*) and faith in the three jewels (*ratanattāya-saddhā*). Because of faith in these real things, things that are, the Dhamma is not founded on vague abstractions or unrealities. And since the Dhamma is inseparably bound to faith, and has faith for its great motivating power, the Dhamma cannot be a rationalism. Without faith (and without faith founded on what exists

and not on empty concepts as in mysticism), no one can expect to obtain what he expects to get from a religion or follow a truly religious life. Faith deriving its authority from facts is the chief sign of genuine religion and also the important principle that affects it from its foundations upwards. According to what has been stated above, the Dhamma is a religion in the sense of a way of life founded on faith that is reasonable. Such faith is always ready to examine things and it encourages open-mindedness, an indispensable ingredient of a truth-seeker's mind, together with the quality of responsiveness or amenability to the influence of truth.

As faith increases in a disciple of the Buddha it becomes a faculty (*indriya*) and a power (*bala*). In the form of believing in the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the community of the ennobled disciples of the Master, faith comes to be, or is what believes in or relies on the Jewels beginning with the Buddha. Trust is what plunges us into the ocean of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the community of ennobled disciples, and enters their virtues, having as it were broken into them. Strong confidence is that by which living beings become very confident in the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the community, or it is that by which they become very confident themselves. Faith is a faculty (*indriya*) in the sense of predominance through its vanquishing disbelief, or because it exercises mastery through its typical quality of conviction. What does not waver with disbelief is the power of faith.

Faith has the characteristic of confidence and of venturing or aspiring. In the form of confidence faith suppresses the hindrances, makes the defilements come to a halt and causes the mind to become bright and not turbid. This feature of faith has been compared to the water-purifying crystal of a universal monarch (*cakkavatti raja*). With a mind that is clear owing to confidence, a man devoted to religious activities gives freely, undertakes the observance of the precepts, performs the practices of the fast-day, and sets about his mental development for enlightenment.

Confidence is born when there is esteem, admiration and affection for the Jewels. Hindrances to faith are doubts about the fruit of action (*kammaphala*) and the meaning and value of the Jewels. Faith arises only when doubts are shed through carefully investigating details of evidence and facts concerning the credibility of these objects of faith. So long as a man has doubts about them he cannot be pleased or satisfied with the Buddha's teaching. But when the doubts disappear the mind becomes as clear as a blue sky freed from clouds. That freeing takes place when a person avoids unbelievers, resorts to those who are endowed with faith, associates and keeps close contact with them, and reflects on confidence-producing suttas.

The other characteristic of faith (venturing mentioned with the faith of the Bodhisatta earlier) is to go beyond what is actually known with hope or expectation of success in a useful enterprise, or to take the risk of trusting or confiding in a person for some good purpose, or to have the courage

to undertake the doing of noble actions (having decided to take what comes). The faith-characteristic of venturing has been compared to the action of a stout warrior, a great soldier, who leads safely to and fro from bank to bank those too timid to cross a swollen river infested with crocodiles and other dangerous creatures, repelling them as they come towards him with his mighty sword. The faith-characteristic of venturing like that of strong confidence precedes acts of liberality, precept-observance, performance of fast-day practices, and the beginning of inner development for liberation.

Again, faith is considered according to characteristics, function, intelligibility, and the condition closest to its arising. Believing or trusting is its characteristic. Its function is producing the serenity and placidity of confidence through dispelling the sludge, slush and mud of doubt and uncertainty like the water-purifying crystal of a universal monarch (*cakkavattirāja*), or the spirit of venturing comparable to the seasoned warrior's crossing of a swollen river infested with dangerous creatures. Faith is understood, or becomes intelligible, when either there is freedom from impurity of doubt or when there is conviction or certitude. The condition closest to the arising of faith is an object that inspires faith or the factors of stream-entrance. These factors are following good men (the Buddhas and those who approximate them), listening to the Dhamma, systematic right attention, and practise that conforms to the Dhamma. (S V 347)

It has also been said that faith should be seen as a hand, as wealth and as a seed. That means that faith is like a hand for grasping meritorious, wholesome states, like wealth in obtaining all kinds of happiness, and like seed harvesting immortal fruit.

From what has been so far set forth it can be seen that faith gives subjective certainty of the Buddha's teaching on reasonable grounds. Common credulity is a form of blind trust. When blindness falls away from common credulity owing to the arising of authentic and relevant knowledge about an object of faith, a man is established in faith provided the object is worthy of belief. Blind faith is not compatible with the reasonable doctrine of the Buddha and is repugnant to the intelligent. Both common credulity and meaningless scepticism have to be shunned. Without confidence in a teaching no progress can be made in it. If a person cannot engender belief in Nibbāna, conditioned arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), and the fruit of action here and hereafter (*kammaphala*), then for him there will never come into being the energy to set himself to work for liberation from ill, in the doctrine of the Buddha. Firm trust and the spirit of venturing, it may be said, is the core of faith, and it is difficult to conceive how one could ignore these aspects of faith in any effort for liberation from ill in the Dhamma, even if one would. It is because of the very great place that faith has in the dispensation of the Blessed One and in all undertakings to increase the welfare of mankind that the Buddha taught thus:

“Ānanda, in these three places you should establish, fix, and make firm friends, companions, and kith and kin, who think they ought to hear the doctrine. In what three places? In confidence founded on knowledge concerning the Buddha you should establish them, fix them, and make them firm, thus: ‘So is the Blessed One consummate, fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and practice, sublime, knower of the worlds, peerless, guide of tameable men, teacher of divine and human beings, enlightened, blessed.’

In confidence founded on knowledge concerning the Dhamma, you should establish them, fix them, and make them firm, thus: ‘The Dhamma of the Blessed One is revealed well, realisable now, immediate, open for seeing, leading onwards, and knowable by the intelligent by themselves.’

In confidence founded on knowledge concerning the community of bhikkhus, should you establish them, fix them, and make them firm, thus: ‘The community of the disciples of the Blessed One has practised well, the community of the disciples of the Blessed One has practised uprightly, the community of the disciples of the Blessed One has practised in the right path, the community of the disciples of the Blessed One has practised what befits it. The community of the disciples of the Blessed One, that is to say, the four pairs of persons and the eight kinds of

individuals, is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of reverential salutations, and is the world's unsurpassable field of merit.'

Ānanda, there may be change in the four great elements, earth, water, fire, and air, but the noble disciple who is endowed with confidence founded on knowledge concerning the Buddha, with confidence founded on knowledge concerning the Dhamma, with confidence founded on knowledge concerning the community of bhikkhus, cannot change. That is to say, it is impossible for him to be reborn in hell, or as an animal, or where unhappy spirits dwell.

Ānanda, in these three places of confidence founded on knowledge you should establish, fix, and make firm, friends, companions, and kith and kin, who think they ought to listen to the doctrine." (A I 222)

Thus it becomes clear how important it is to have faith, confidence, or trust in objects worthy of belief, in objects connected with the realisation of Nibbāna (the peace that arises with the final destruction of craving in all forms). The faith mentioned in the sutta cited above belongs to the *sotāpanna*, the stream-entrant, [3] who has reached the supramundane path (*lokuttara magga*). But it is not possible to come to have that faith of the noble disciple (*ariya sāvaka*) without cultivating, before entry into the supramundane path, all the qualities that reach perfection in that path. The

faith of those who have not reached the noble path is feeble in regard to certitude and consistency. Yet the faith of the man intent on the realisation of the first holy path (*paṭhamāriya-magga*), from the time he goes for refuge to the three jewels, is superior to the faith of those with no such high aim, that is, of those who have not made the supramundane the basis for their spiritual growth. In the dispensation of the Buddha, however, even the going for refuge to the jewels, the very first act of faith has the thought of reaching the supramundane as basis, if the going for refuge is properly done.

Failure in development of mind (*cittabhāvanā*) and of wisdom (*paññābhāvanā*) particularly is due to lack of faith in the genuine teaching of the Buddha and to resorting to deviations of it, which are often contravenes of the original teaching of the Buddha in the Pali canon. Faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, respect for the precepts, and application to the teaching of concentration taught by the Blessed One, ensure the continuation of the Buddha's dispensation. But all that makes for the swift disappearance of the doctrine and the discipline of the Blessed One stems from lack of faith, disregard for the precepts, the neglect of the way of concentration taught by the Master, which is in the Pali canon. Of these destructive things the worst is the waning of faith. Therefore it is said: "The bhikkhu who is wanting in faith (*assaddho bhikkhu*) falls away from good qualities (*guṇehi cavati*) and is not able to establish himself in the good law, in the true doctrine of the

dispensation” (*sāsana-saddhamme patitṭhātuṃ na sakkoti*). (A III 6–7)

Faith is indispensable

**for mundane as well as
supramundane progress.**

In the instruction to Āḷavakā (S I 214), the Master said, “Faith is man’s best wealth here”, affirming the words of his predecessor in the lineage of the noble ones, the Buddha Kassapa, and setting forth the mundane and the supramundane aspects of faith.

It is said in our books that as jewels and gold bring about worldly enjoyment, do away with hunger and thirst, end poverty, become the cause of getting various other valuable things and produce worldly honour, so do mundane and supramundane faith bring into being the bliss of the world and of what is beyond it. Supramundane faith destroys birth and old age, and producing the gems of the enlightenment factors, gives bliss here and now, and deathlessness hereafter. Both kinds of faith bring the praise and appreciation of the good at all times. The riches of faith never depart from one, always accompany one, and are

one's own unfailing treasure. Mundane faith is the cause of all gains in the world, even that of silver and gold; the man endowed with faith, having given freely and acquired merit, becomes a possessor of material wealth. The one who lacks faith, however, comes to harm and hurt even with the material wealth he possesses now. So it is said, "Faith is man's best wealth in the world."

The aspirant to spiritual perfection acknowledges on trust the truth of his yet unrealised goal. Without faith in the truth and realisability of his aim the impulse to achieve it becomes very weak (if it does not entirely disappear) through misgivings and doubts. Faith gives the impetus and makes him take not merely the first step but every step in his long pilgrimage to uttermost purity. That is because faith is one of the powerful good (*sobhana*) mental properties universal to all wholesome conscious states connected with inner development, and every effort that tends goal-wards belongs to such a conscious state of merit.

Faith is the trunk, the hand, of the great bull elephant, the powerful tusker, the Buddha said (Th 694). It is with faith that the highest is reached by the Enlightened One. It is thus the means of gaining supreme bliss.

Faith gathers the provisions for the journey (S I 44), that is to say, the journey from saṃsāra to Nibbāna along a happy road of good rebirths, as it causes the doing of meritorious deeds. Faith is the first of the seven treasures of the noble (*ariyadhana*). It has been shown above that faith is a faculty

(indriya) and a power (bala). Around faith cluster the forces of effort, conscientiousness, fear of reckless action censured by the wise, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

Material treasures are subject to destruction by the moth and rust of change and decay. Worldly possessions are in danger of being taken away by rulers and robbers, destroyed by fire and flood, and run through by one's own heirs. But faith and other treasures of the mind last. So the man with faith and other virtues can never be a pauper, empty, or helpless by oneself.

Faith is the first of the five factors necessary for noble exertion (*pañca padhāniyaṅgāni*). The others are health, candour through absence of hypocrisy and deceit, energy, and the wisdom of renunciation. Faith is also the forerunner of all things of value, beginning with giving freely, in the Buddha's dispensation.

Four kinds of faith are recognised in the Dhamma: faith of the *sammā bodhisatta* beginning with his first resolve to become a Supreme Buddha (*āgamana-saddhā*); the faith of the hearers of the Buddha who realise the paths and the fruits of sanctitude (*adhigama-saddhā*); the firm trust in the three Jewels after considering their qualities (*okappanā-saddhā*); and the trusting in what is wholesome, meritorious and generally good (*pasada-saddhā*). Thus every kind of faith, concerning things leading to well-being from the attainment of short-lived belief (*khaṇika pasāda*), through a momentary dispelling of doubt, to faith of the ariyas, can be found in the

Dhamma.

Faith exists in the form of a predominant condition (*adhipaccaya-bhāvena*) of the function of believing (*saddhādhana kiriyāya*) of conscious mental properties. When there is this functionally conditioning predominance of believing belonging to mental properties in a conscious state, it is said, "A person believes."

Faith is like a boat to ferry one across the flood of wrong views to safety, a strong branch to lift a man on to the giant tree of virtue when pursued by the wild oxen of the passions, and is the door that shuts out the serpent of unbelief. Like a strong cable that holds a ship to its anchor in stormy weather, faith keeps a man attached to the Triple Gem during the destructive storms of scepticism that trouble him while he is still far from the noble path.

As a pillar of the king's fort firmly fixed on the ground and unable to be shaken (for the protection of those in the fort and for repulsing enemies), so is faith for keeping off all enervating influences in the course of a man's struggle for virtue, concentration and wisdom, as well as for his protection. There is no possibility of a disciple falling into demeritorious states, says the Blessed One, as long as the disciple places faith on wholesome things; but when faith goes, the disciple becomes possessed of unbelief and gets himself involved in evil actions.

Until a disciple of his is not impelled by faith and other good impulses, the Buddha says that he watches him, but

once faith and other qualities connected with faith begin to operate in him, the Master, knowing that his disciple is guarded and incapable of slackening, no longer keeps his eye on him.

About the saying of the Buddha that faith is the seed, the ancients have written thus: Just as a grain-growing farmer cannot cultivate his field without seed, so the farmer of the spirit cannot produce anything of real value without faith in the rightness, desirability and practicability of the Buddha's teaching for the extinction of ill. The farmer's seed does two things: it establishes itself in the earth by its roots, and sends upward shoots and sprouts. In like manner, the seed of faith establish itself in the field of the human heart with the roots of virtue and send upward the shoots of serenity and insight (*samatha-vipassanā*). As the material seed (after drawing up the essences of earth and water by its stem) grows for the purpose of making its fruit reach maturity, so the faith of the yogi grows for the purpose of bringing the fruit of ariyan wisdom to ripening after drawing up the essence of serenity (*samatha*) and of insight (*vipassanā*) through the stem of the ariyan path. The material seed, having established itself in the soil, having grown, increased, and become great, by developing roots, shoots, leaves, and stem, produces milky juice, and brings into being ears of corn heavy with a multitude of grain. Likewise, the seed of faith planted in the mind, having grown, increased, and become great on account of the purification of virtue (*sīlavisuddhi*), the purification of mind (*cittavisuddhi*), the purification of

view (*ditṭhivisuddhi*), the purification of transcending doubt (*kaṅkhāvitarāṇa-visuddhi*), the purification of knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path (*maggāmagga-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*), and the purification of knowledge and vision of practice (*paṭipadā-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*), produces the milk of the purification of knowledge and vision (*ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*) and brings into being the crop of consummate saintship, heavy with manifold analytical and supernormal knowledge. So the Blessed One said, "Faith is the seed." (Sn 77) Though faith arises with many other wholesome mental states, it is (on account of its function) called the seed. As consciousness performs the function of knowing, so faith performs the function of a seed and is the source of all wholesome things. Accordingly it is said:

"One who is endowed with faith in the Buddha's teaching resorts to a preceptor or a teacher and performs the duties of a pupil. Through association with the teacher he gets instruction; bearing the instruction in mind he ponders on it, gets at the general meaning of the doctrine, and is pleased with the understanding of it. The pleasure of understanding it produces zest for the practice of it; and imbued with zest, he endeavours to grasp the deep aspects of the Dhamma, while practising for reaching the supramundane. When his practice becomes perfect, he realises the highest truth and becomes one with it."

Refuge in the Triple Gem

by

Soma Thera

Taking refuge in the Buddha is really taking refuge in what one understands as the qualities of the Buddha. Whatever the qualities of the Buddha may be, one cannot understand those which one's mind is incapable of apprehending, those which one's imagination is not virile enough to seize.

Just as it requires a great artist to take in the wonder and charm of a grand landscape and transfer it on to a canvas, so it needs a man of cultivated mind even to know, abstractly, the might and majesty, the fascination and purity, the compassion and love, and the other great traits of the Master in a worthy way.

No true idea of the Buddha, however, can be got by merely studying the books or by mere logical thinking and the working up of religious emotion. To gain a fairly clear idea of the Buddha and to take effective refuge in him we must produce in our own selves some small fraction at least of the

qualities which constitute the Buddha.

We can understand a thing rightly and fully only by making it a part of ourselves mentally, and where possible, translating what we see in thought into action as the artist translates his impressions on to a canvas. If we want to understand the renunciation of the Buddha, we must ourselves give up things; we must renounce, as he renounced, things that we hold dear in this crumbling, dissolving world. To understand his compassion our hearts must melt in mercy for our suffering fellow beings. To understand his uprightness we ourselves must be straight. And if by such practice we approximate to the Master in pitch of actual achievement in spirituality we shall feel that we have taken refuge in him for very good reasons. We shall then feel in some way a new light dawning on us and shall rise to a clearer view than we had ever before of life and its possibilities. Then we shall be taking refuge in the Buddha not through words but through deeds, and also because we have found him an efficient guide to happiness by following his instructions and proving the truth of his word.

Through experience of the truth of the Buddha at first hand one comes to see that in the Buddha is reached the full extinction of sorrow through the extinction of all the possible causes of sorrow, namely, lust, hatred and ignorance; that other teachers are not invulnerable to sorrow as he; that they are not all-compassionate as he; and that they are not detached from all things as he. One finds them

holding on to some form or another of life and as no life is unchanging they are all subject to the pain which change brings directly or indirectly. Further, as what changes cannot be the true self, they are all under some form of delusion as regards an abiding soul, or both an eternal soul and God.

Sentient life is consciousness, and every other goal of religion (except nibbāna), be it in the form of the Vedantic absorption in the *paramātman* or of the Christian communion with Father in Heaven, or of the emancipated soul of the Jainas, is based on something fleeting. For in all these non-Buddhist goals there is some kind of consciousness, and consciousness will not keep to just one form (unchanging) if it is consciousness. It is only in the Buddhadhamma that we find uttermost release from sorrow through the uttermost release from every vestige of consciousness. And when Buddhists take refuge in the Dhamma they take refuge in just this uttermost release, knowing from their own experience that to be conscious is to be sick as the Buddha unambiguously teaches us. Here too, taking refuge in the Dhamma is taking refuge in the conception of the Teaching in us.

This uttermost release, nibbāna, the *summum bonum*, the highest in the sense of the most excellent of all things, is what the Buddha discovered and revealed to us. And we who follow him resemble him in that we too are seekers of nibbāna (*nibbāna-pariyesaka*). For though he revealed to the world the existence of nibbāna and pointed out the direction

in which it lies, each one has to tread the way leading to the goal, see it for oneself, and thus rediscover it personally.

There is in the Buddhadhamma no quest for a hare's horn, for something that does not exist, but for something borne witness to by the Buddha and his disciples and which we ourselves can test and see. There is nothing mystical or occult in it; it is accessible to anyone who has the courage and wisdom to tread the path to perfection through unceasing endeavour.

Says a scripture: "Well-expounded is the Dhamma by the Master, realisable here and now, timeless, inviting, leading truthwards, to be known by the wise, individually, namely, the crushing of the libidinous, the subjugating of life's thirst, the uprooting of desire, the breaking of the circle of becoming, the void, the hard-to-get-at dissolution of craving, detachment, cessation, nibbāna."

Of this same Teaching the Buddha says: "Seeking nibbāna I realised the birthless, peerless, perfectly secure blowing out; the unageing, the unailing, the undying, the sorrowless, the speckless ... Difficult to see, to understand, tranquil, excellent, is what I reached."

To reach that goal, far-off at the moment to many of us, we can set forward just now by becoming mindful of our actions, words and thoughts, so that we do not lust or hate or get deluded with the delusion of permanence, beauty, pleasure, or immortal soul in regard to anything. By such practice we move Nibbāna-wards and when we see that by

such mindfulness of the real nature of things we are freed from sorrow temporarily, we can infer that if we increase such mindfulness and make it a settled feature of our thought we shall be finally freed of all ill. Thus it will become clear that taking refuge in the Teaching of the Buddha is no act of blind belief but a practical method ever provable as an efficient one, if we are serious about abolishing suffering in ourselves.

In the same way on sure ground, inferred from our well-founded belief in the Buddha and the norm, is taking refuge in the Order of Pure Persons (the Ariya Sangha) established. Through even a little practice of the teaching we know that it is realisable. And, when we read the records of the pure persons from the Buddha downwards, we feel that they are the perfect patterns of the good life in its highest meaning, and that what they have done we too could do. This confidence which they inspire causes to arouse in us all that is lofty and pure when we dwell upon their virtues. They become for us fields of the highest yield, for in them we sow the seed of our faith in human nature at its best and reap the fruit of the very noblest endeavour: the final ceasing from all ill.

This is the statement in brief of the great triple theme of refuge, the basis of the Buddhist outlook. Without this refuge progress in good is not settled and steady. With it, work on the path becomes easy to a great extent because of clarification of purpose and of the emergence of a sense of proper values.

Saddhā: Buddhist Devotion

by

Sister Dhammadinnā

The object of Buddhist devotion is what is known as the Triple Gem or the Threefold Refuge, comprising the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, viz., the fully Enlightened One, His Doctrine, and the Order of His Noble Disciples.

And the practice of devotion consists in meditating on the qualities of these Three Refuges.

These qualities are embodied in the most simple yet profound formula familiar to all Buddhists from the time they learn how to speak, and which they recite on most occasions.

Buddha comes first in the Triple Gem, worshipped and followed as the Great Teacher and Spiritual Master. The word Buddha implies the attainment of Supreme Enlightenment (*sammā sambodhi*). In other words, Buddha implies a state of perfection and not a person.

Hence Buddha is not a personality, a God, an Avatar, nor an incarnation of some God. Prayers to Him, rituals, blind faith in Him, have no meaning whatsoever.

Dhamma or Nirvana (in this context the transcendental truth) is also the supermundane Path (*magga*) leading to the perfect Truth, which has been discovered by the Buddha.

Reflection on the Dhamma means reflection on the nature of its transcendental attributes; in other words reflection on the state of perfect deliverance, being freed from all saṃsāric turmoils, and a blissful condition of peace which has once and for all done with death and rebirth.

The Sangha is the Order of the Noble Disciples who have achieved the Goal or have entered the Path which leads to the Goal, thus forming the living example for those still striving. In brief, the Buddha is the way-finder, the Teacher, the Guide; the Dhamma is the Way, the Teaching; and the Sangha refers to those teaching the way, or treading the way, the real followers of the Teaching.

In the course of the actual practice of devotion, however, these three embody, and culminate in, one idea: the Truth.

Hence devotion is directed towards an ever present reality and not towards a dead teacher or empty abstractions.

Devotional acts call into play many forces and faculties of the mind. The most important of these is *saddhā*, or confidence in the Triple Gem (the Refuges) which is associated with other factors such as gratitude, love, joy, and deep reverence and worship, forming a whole that we

call the devotional aspect.

It must be clearly understood that this *saddhā* (confidence), born of knowledge, is essentially different from the Hindu “*bhakti*” or Christian “faith” since there is no element of a purely emotional affection or any personal relationship or blind credulity.

Saddhā has the background of understanding with regard to the nature of *saṃsāra*, and also with regard to the significance of the Refuges. At the last it must be accompanied by a conviction in the operation of the Law of Karma as a factor that sustains and perpetuates this endless course of life and death. Since *saddhā* is an indispensable factor governing all spiritual growth, it is called the seed from which is born the tree that bears the fruit of deliverance.

Among the five factors of spiritual powers and spiritual faculties, *saddhā* (faith or confidence), *virīya* (energy), *satī* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration), *paññā* (intuitive wisdom), the primary factor is *saddhā*, which, if properly cultivated, conditions the development of the rest. In its highest supermundane sense, *saddhā* is unshakable faith in the Triple Gem (the Refuges), achievable through the attainment of the Noble Path. Only in this sense is it true “self-surrender” which is the culmination of devotion.

Self-surrender, in the Buddhist sense, is not becoming one with any “universal spirit”, etc., but it is the entire abandonment, down to the last vestige, of all self-notion

and personality-belief which, if accomplished, brings to pass the overcoming of two other mental fetters: “doubt and wavering,” and “clinging to rites and rituals.”

Lastly, *saddhā* arouses concomitant factors such as assurance, joy and gratitude. As one realises the tremendous significance of the Refuges, as the True Refuge from the toils and tumults of *saṃsāra*, a deliberate and conscious cultivation of this one factor means the development of the entire devotional aspect, which forms the fount and source of all mental energy.

Notes

1. A.E. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 13f.
2. *Sabbadā sabbasattānaṃ hitāya ca sukhāya ca. Uyyutto akilāsū ca aho acchariyo jino.*

Cariyapiṭaka 329

3. This is the first fruit-attainer (*paṭhama-phala-lābhi*); he is the first noble one who attains intelligent faith (*aveccappasāda*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. The first path-attainer (*paṭhama-magga-lābhi*) has yet to attain perfection in it; he has only the faculty of faith (*saddhindriya*) in its initial stage along with the other four faculties of energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

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